

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Growing Up in West Rutland: A Jewish Heritage



The Rosen children (l to r) front, Quarterly author Clara, and Sidney; center, Irving; rear, Sara, Harry, and David.

About the Author

At age 78 Clara Rosen Eisen was an enthusiastic student of genealogy at Community College of Vermont in Rutland. The year was 1990 and Mrs. Eisen's assignment was to gather and set down her early family memories. This she did in detail and with humor and earned an "A" from her professor.

The Rutland Historical Society is privileged to have Mrs. Eisen's permission to reproduce portions of her recollections of life while growing up in West Rutland. Times were indeed hard during the "Depression Years" but Clara and her brothers and sister were sustained by a courageous mother, their strong Jewish heritage and the community spirit of West Rutland.

Clara graduated from West Rutland High School in 1930, a member of the first class to graduate from the new marble building. In 1936 she married Ben Eisen who managed M. H. Fishman "5 and 10" stores for many years. Their two children, Charles, now a lawyer in Washington, D.C. , and Marsha, a high school English teacher in Scarsdale, N.Y., grew up in Newark, N.J., where the family ran their own "5 and 10". Ben and Clara Eisen retired to a home on Lake Dunmore and later moved to Rutland Town. Clara, now widowed, is active in the Order of the Eastern Star and the Sisterhood of the Rutland Jewish Center.

Clara Eisen's story is a tribute to her mother, Gussie Rosen Doloff, whose strength and character molded the lives of the entire Rosen family. Gussie's husband, Michael, (a peddler) was absent from his family for weeks at a time and died an untimely death at age 47. Gussie was left as the sole support of their six children plus two boys she had taken in to raise for a cousin, Morris Doloff.

At age 50, she married Morris Doloff and moved to Crescent Street in Rutland. She was an active member of the Temple Sisterhood, the Council of Jewish Women, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Ladies Oriental Shrine of North America and a charter member of the Rutland Jewish Center. She died at age 93, an inspiration to all who knew her.



Clara



Gussie

Growing Up in West Rutland: A Jewish Heritage

by Clara Rosen Eisen

Gussie Rosen, my mother, was born Gittel Rote-Rosen in Marijampole in the province of Suwalki, Lithuania, in 1886. Marijampole was known as the first educational center as it had the only "Gymnasium" in the area. In the United States this would be known as a college preparatory school. Her father, Abraham (my grandfather), was under contract to supply the commissary of the Russian army with kerosene. His best friend, Judge Mamonoff, was the Chief Justice in the district court. He had been an aide-de-camp to Tsar Nicholas II in St. Petersburg. Grandfather Abraham was offered an assignment in the Russian secret police; however, if he had accepted, he would have had to report at least two political offenders each month. He refused and then started a timber business. This venture didn't work out too well, so he decided to come to the United States. He was encouraged by his brother Louis who had migrated to Center Rutland with his sons.

My grandfather left Lithuania in 1901 with my mother, the oldest of five children, and my uncle Morris, the youngest. He left my grandmother and three girls behind until he could save enough money to send for them. He immediately became a dry goods peddler, carrying a heavy pack on his back and hiking to Proctor, Pittsford, West Rutland, Ira and Tinmouth to sell to the Polish families who had come to work in the Vermont Marble Company and the slate quarries. He eventually gave this up and worked for his nephew who owned a grocery store in Granville, New York. After saving enough money, he sent for the rest of the family in 1904. One year later he bought out his nephew and he and my grandmother remained in the same store and home for the rest of their lives. They both lived into their 90's.

My grandfather matched my mother to a first cousin, Michael Rosen, the son of Louis. They married when she was sixteen and they settled in West Rutland. There she had to learn all the hard basics of being a housewife. She had a wooden scrub board for washing clothes and a wooden tub to bathe in. By the time she was 30, she had six children: David, Irving, Sidney, Sara, Harry, and myself, each two years apart.

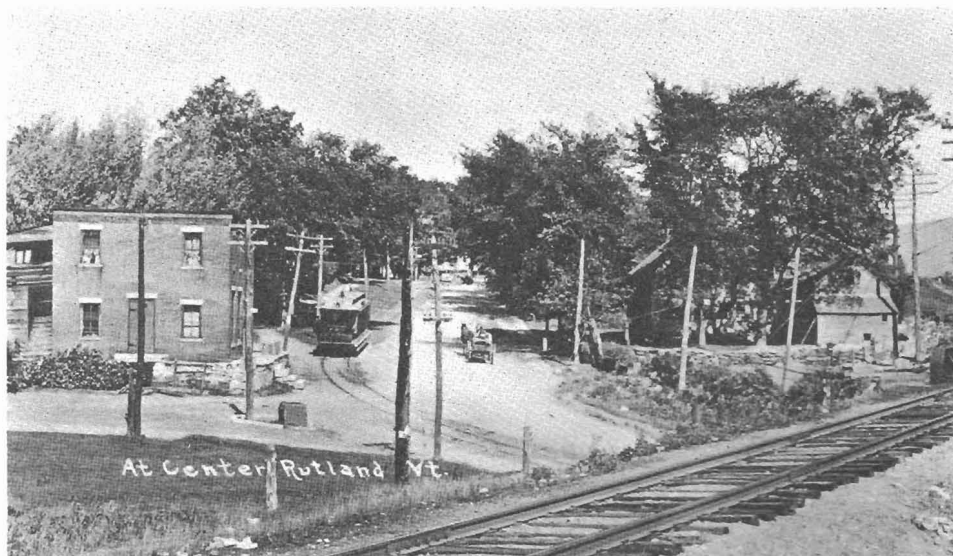
My father, Michael Rosen, and his family left Lithuania a few years earlier than my mother. He and his father, Louis, went to Scotland and Ireland for a short time before leaving for the United States. My grandfather Louis settled for a time in Montpelier, Vermont, where he was a kosher butcher called a "shochet". Leaving Montpelier, he moved to Port Henry, New York, where the coal miners lived. He finally came to Center Rutland where he opened a grocery and dry goods store at the intersection of Route Four and the Old Proctor Road, known as Shedd's Corner. He conducted his business there until he died at age 92.



Wedding picture of Gittel (Gussie) Rote-Rosen and Meyer (Michael) Rosen.



Sima and Louis Rosen of Center Rutland, parents of Michael Rosen.



Louis and Sima Rosen's store and home at Shedd's Corner, Center Rutland.

My father went to West Rutland where he married my mother. He became a peddler with horse and wagon. He would be gone for weeks at a time to buy all kinds of resaleable odds and ends and then come home, bale them and sell them. He bought used tires which he shipped to Michigan and Ohio by the carload from West Rutland. I knew all the branches of the railroad because I would make out the bills of lading for him.

I would always wait for my father on our porch when he came home, usually on Friday, with the horse and wagon. I could see him across a big field and would recognize the decoration on the head of his horse, Jerry. I would run as fast as I could to catch up to him to get a ride on Jerry's back. Father would always yell, "Duck your head to get in the barn door!" Then I'd get a penny out of his long pouch of a purse. He died so young, at age 47, and I was only a child.

Jerry was left to "Chipper" Chapman in my father's will. My father knew that he would put him out to pasture for his remaining days.

My mother became the sole support of our family which now consisted of eight children as my mother had taken in two boys to raise for her cousin, Morris Doloff. She spoke eight languages (Lithuanian, French, German, Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Jewish and English) and found work as an interpreter for the marble business, post office and the Rutland court systems. She also designed Hebrew epitaphs for monuments for some 40 years. She had Louis Kazon, who owned a dress and shirt factory, bring a sewing machine to our kitchen where she sewed for him for years. We would have to sit by lamplight every night after finishing our homework to turn collars and cuffs as it was piece work. We owned our home and all of us were born there and delivered by Dr. Carroll Ross.

Depression

During the Depression we had a hard time. There was no money but plenty of food, home-grown and canned. Income from a few boarders helped out a little financially. The six boys worked at odd jobs and one summer worked on the new marble school.

We had a cow that I used to take to pasture every day at 6 a.m. and then go to bring her home to be milked after school. We sold the excess milk to neighbors for ten cents a quart. Farmer cheese was made out of sour milk which was put into cheese-cloth bags and hung to drain dry. We had whipped cream from the cow's milk and that was put on an apple cake about 18 inches by 20 inches, accompanied by a glass of milk for dinner. We also churned butter from the cream. But no coffee: that was forbidden. Only after we were on our own did we know what coffee tasted like.

There were a few chickens which had to be killed by the kosher butcher, Nathan Gelvan, who would come from Rutland once a week. Food was stored in a dirt cellar which filled with water in the Spring and we would go down and get into a wooden tub and row to the walls to get canned goods, pickles or herring from a barrel. So we never went hungry.

All our bread was home-made and there were pies and cakes by the dozen. My mother baked bread every Friday, and on Saturday morning she would make raised doughnuts out of some of the dough. We would stand in line for our doughnut and after the first one got his he would go to the back of the line. They would always push me to the back and get ahead of me. It was a while before I realized what was going on and that I was missing my share. I was always the quiet one but when I discovered what they were doing, I wasn't quiet anymore.

We had meat and potatoes for dinner as the boys all worked after school and during the summer. I was the only one who didn't like the meals so I was punished by getting nothing to eat and was sent outside to wait on the large wrap-around porch. The meat, fresh-killed by the kosher butcher, was very tough, not aged at all.

Ordinarily we all sat down together to eat and that was discussion time with Mother. Our house had only lamplight and a black kitchen stove with a reservoir on the back for heating hot water. In winter, all of us would rush to the kitchen to get warm and put our socks in the oven to take off the chill. The clothes were hung in the kitchen in the winter as they would have frozen on the outdoor line.

My mother sewed very well and made all our clothes. I used to wear petticoats (slips) made out of bleached flour sacks. The lettering on them read "Gold Medal Flour, Why Not Now?" and that never came out of the fabric. When I got older I had only hand-me-downs from my aunt. My first new coat was bought when I earned my own money.

My mother knitted the boys' sweaters and they were handed down from one to the other. She made their clothes till they could buy their own.

I remember my favorite piece of clothing was a blue velvet dress with a gray squirrel collar because my mother made it for my cousin. She outgrew it and I got it in the mail one day and was so happy. It was the first thing that ever fit me correctly. I felt so rich.

Education

We were very poor and my mother could not afford to send us to college but her one ambition was for each of us to graduate from high school. Mother wanted us to do our best in any studies or work that we undertook and to be happy in what we were doing.

She was a very strong disciplinarian and taught us to respect all our fellow men regardless of race, color or creed. She believed in honesty, compassion, dedication to studies and the achievement of something special in life. We gave to the downtrodden all that we could.

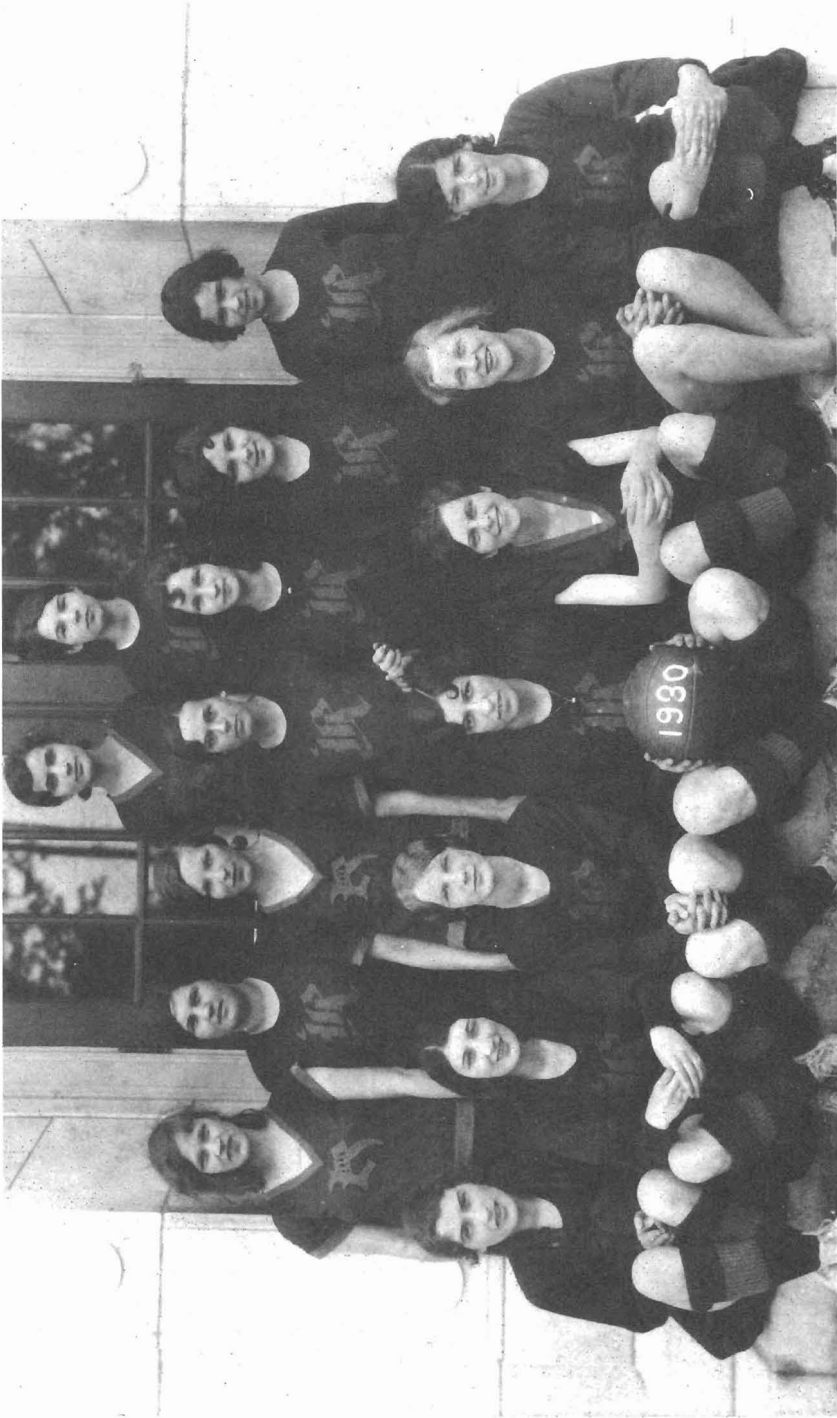
She wanted to be proud of each of us. Her pinnacle was reached when each of the six of us graduated at the top of our class and received the silver loving cup for honors and extra-curricular activities. We all took business courses and shorthand and typing. The teacher who made the biggest impression on me was Frank Hinchey. He was principal, athletic coach, guidance counsellor and a friend.



HINCHEY

Frank Hinchey

If any student wasn't going to be able to graduate, he would tutor him one month after school so he wouldn't flunk. His principles were of the highest order. He was a father figure to me. When I couldn't afford five dollars for a basketball uniform (and I was very good at the game of basketball) he got me a job on Saturdays helping the music teacher, Miss Bliss, so I could earn the money. When I graduated he gave me a gold basketball to put on a bracelet. The year and the championship were engraved on it. When we went on the bus to play games out of town the Rosen family members all got bus sick, but Frank Hinchey always had a bag of lemons for us to suck on.



The 1930 West Rutland High School Girls Basketball team. (l to r) Top row, Irma Valach, Marion Piper; Middle row, Helen Maciak, Connie Crawford, unidentified, Beatrice Parker, Doris McCabe, Mary Fleming; Front row unidentified, Virginia Noyes, unidentified, Captain Clara Rosen, unidentified, Anna Brink, Josephine Burke.

Home Life

The family sicknesses were all treated at home. Green's syrup of tar was for any colds. A chunk of camphor was worn around the neck on a string to ward off germs.

My brothers would trap skunks to sell the pelts and my mother would render the fat outside and bottle it to rub on any sprains or torn ligaments. When you got the measles you stayed in a dark room for one week. Light wasn't supposed to help the rash at all. If you sprained a finger playing ball, you would bandage it with a flat wooden stick (such as a doctor uses to examine the throat) to hold the joint until it healed.

Each of us put away fifty cents a week in the bank out of the dollar we earned working Saturdays. When the banks closed we each lost twenty-five dollars from a year's savings and didn't save again for a long while. Our faith in the American ideology was shattered. Still, all the setbacks made us better persons. We survived and went forward.

We had all nationalities living in our neighborhood, and could rely on them for anything we needed. The only colored person we had ever seen in Vermont was Bob Johnson who taught my older brother how to play the saxophone. He ate some meals with us and stayed over night with us when the weather was bad. That was our introduction to integration which we all took in our stride. We liked Bob very much.

We had an Irish neighbor named Connell whose son went to school with my brother. He drank a lot. One night his friends asked him if he wanted to go to a square dance in Ira that evening. He said "Sure". They put him in the back of the truck not knowing that he had a whiskey bottle with him. When they got to Ira they went to get him out but he was drunk as could be. So they covered him up and let him sleep. When they got home they put him to bed and the next day they asked him if he had had a good time at the square dance. He said, "Pretty good, but I can't remember the name of the girl I danced with all night. I'd like to take her out again."

Other neighbors were the Fagans who were French. They were wonderful people. Mr. Fagan didn't have much money so when electricity was put in, he devised a way to sidetrack the power. He would be reading by lamplight on the day that the meter man called. Later he would connect the power back up so the bill wouldn't be too much.

My brothers had a little bicycle repair shop on one of our lots and they would let the card players use it on weekends. They gave the boys a portion of the winnings for letting them use it. That's how they made spending money.

On Hallowe'en all the boys would "raise cain". We had only "two-holers" then, so they would go around the neighborhood and turn them all over and sneak away. The neighbors were very angry.

I remember my mother warning my older brother to be in by 11:00 at night or she would lock him out. It never failed that he would always get in later than 11:00 p.m. so he would come to my bedroom window and give one toot on his kazoo and I would open the window and let him in. It took mother a long time before she found out how he got in.

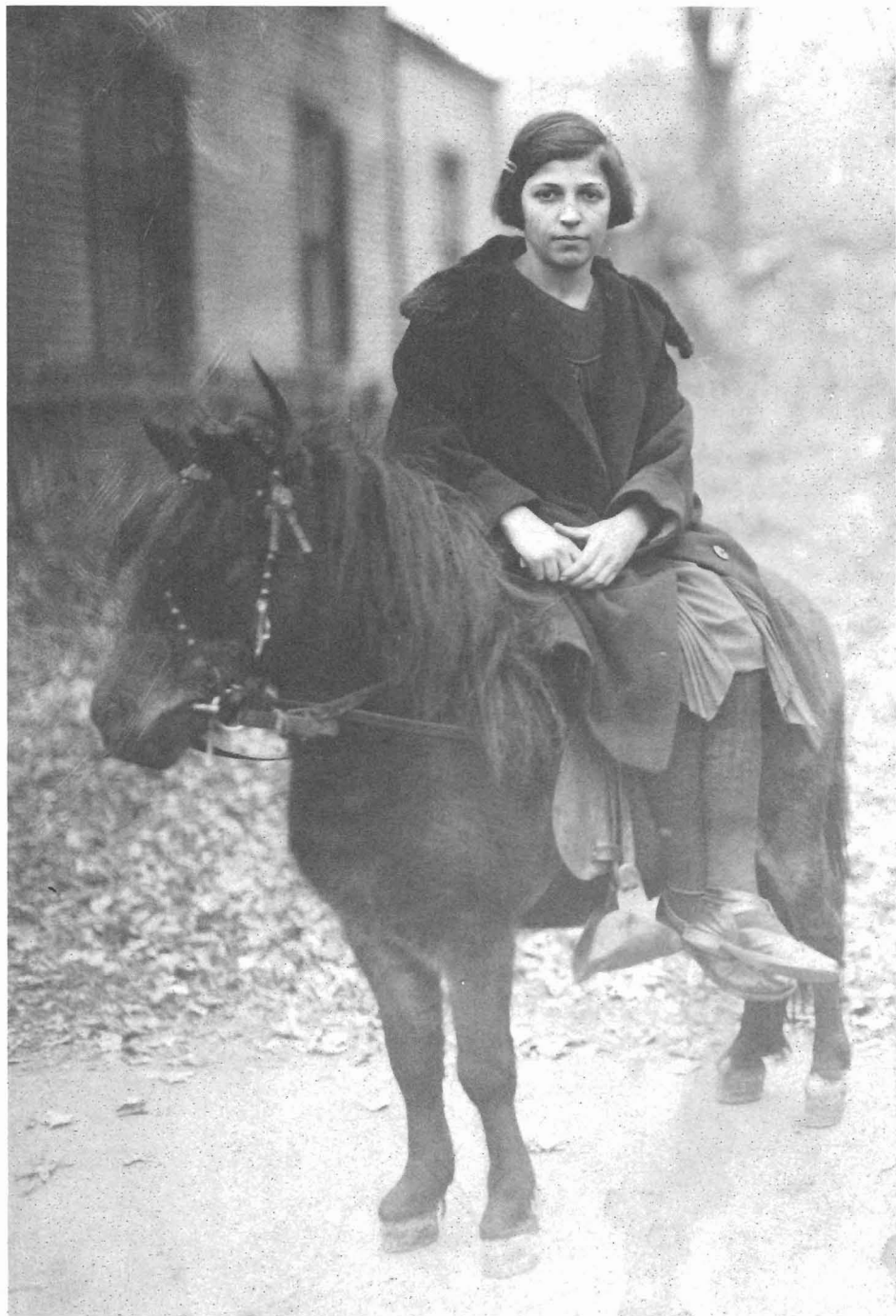
Entertainment

We children all belonged to either the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts and all played music. We took the trolley to Rutland on Saturdays to have our lessons with the Sisters of St. Joseph. It cost one dollar an hour. In winter we skated on a rink behind the high school or would get a ride to the Proctor rink. In summer we went swimming in the river that borders Boardman Hill. When we were older, we went to Crystal Beach on Lake Bomoseen. There was also dancing to big bands like Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller in the Crystal Ballroom near the lake.

When a truck picked up the quarry workmen at 5:30 a.m. near our house, we would get a ride to Clarendon to pick raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. We had our lunch and a big bucket for the berries. We made cups out of white birch bark to hold the berries that we picked, then we dumped them into the big pail. We picked all day and got a ride home in the same truck. Mother made jelly, jam and pies.



Enjoying a musical moment at their grandparents' home in Granville, N.Y., are (l to r) cousin Ruth Kugel and sisters Sara and Clara.



A pensive Clara poses on a Shetland pony for an itinerant photographer in 1927.

For winter fun we took wooden barrel staves and put them in the warm water of the reservoir at the back of the kitchen stove. We would bend them a little as the wood softened and then get a nice fat chunk of wood to attach to the stave. We nailed a seat on top of the chunk of wood. The barrel stave curled a little after the overnight bath. This made a fine jump jack to sit on. With your feet held up, you could slide down the mountainside behind the school.

That was our entertainment. We were always together.

Politics

The first thing I remember politically was in 1923 when President Calvin Coolidge took the oath of office in his father's home in Plymouth, Vermont, after President Harding died. As Coolidge's father was a Notary Public at the time, he gave him the oath of office. All Vermonters were quite proud.

The next memory was when President Roosevelt came to Rutland. A new paved surface had been put on Main Street. I watched the parade and was only a few feet away from him when he waved to me.

My dad wasn't interested in politics at all but mother was very involved when she had time. My parents were very staunch Republicans. Mother was a lister and took the census for many years because of her fluency in eight languages.

Religion

Both my grandfathers, Louis Rosen and Abraham Rote-Rosen, had been rabbis in Lithuania. The first Rutland synagogue, called Anshei Sholom, was built in West Rutland since there were more Jewish families there than in Rutland. The cemetery was in East Poultney where the early Jewish families of West Rutland are buried.

The original synagogue was small but beautiful with a carved oak "bimah" or altar. It was in the middle of the room with a narrow canopy around the top about eight feet off the floor. Two steps led up to small slanted tables which held the Bibles. The Torah scrolls with the translations of the Prophets and the Torah were in closets just large enough to hold them. The scrolls were covered in beautiful, rich velvet, red or gold. Two receptacles on the top held the silver ornamental decorations. They were taken out every week and on holidays and the rabbi read from them. The women sat in the balcony as was compulsory.

The women were required to bathe every Friday before the Sabbath began. A small building was built on the right of the synagogue because that was where the clean water came in. It was called a "mikvah". In the center of this small structure was a four-sided cement cubicle and in the center of that was a pot-bellied stove (metal and waterproof) set up on a foundation about three feet high. My brothers would go there every Friday morning and build a fire in the stove to warm the water which surrounded it. The cubicle was about ten feet square. There were steps to go down into about four feet of water. The water was piped in from a spring outside and the dirty water piped out by a small generator. Two planks of wood were put down at a slight angle from the edge of the door to the stove to bring the wood to the stove. It was here that the women bathed for the Sabbath.

During the 1920's, more Jewish families had settled in Rutland. Early services were held in the upstairs hall of the wooden building on the northwest corner of West Street and Merchants Row. The Marble Savings Bank was later constructed on this site. Later services were held in a brick house on the northwest corner of West and Elm Streets. When the Baxter Memorial Library (built in 1889) was put up for sale in 1927 it was purchased for \$12,500 as a permanent place for worship for the Jewish community. A new Jewish cemetery was established in North Clarendon, across from the airport.

The West Rutland congregation merged with the Rutland Jewish Center. The West Rutland shul (synagogue) was sold to Mr. Potter who owned Potter's Garage because it was no longer being used by the Jewish community. The proceeds of the sale were donated to the new Rutland Jewish Center. The West Rutland building later burned to the ground.

Funerals were conducted differently years ago. There would be six or seven older people who would come to a home and sew a shroud out of cotton material. If a man died, he would be buried with his prayer shawl around his shoulders in a plain pine casket.

There wasn't any mortuary for Jews around here, so Aldous Funeral Home offered their facilities. Now they send the body first to Burlington where the men prepare it and return it to Rutland by hearse. The Jewish tradition is to be buried the next day unless it falls on the Sabbath. At the cemetery the family gathers around the grave and after the rabbi commits the body to the Lord, each one of the immediate family throws a shovelful of dirt on the casket. All wear black arm bands for a week and, in the home, prayers are said every morning and evening for one week. Friends come to join with the family in this ceremony. Not everyone abides by these customs today, but our family does. No flowers are placed on the grave. Whenever a grave is visited, the visitor puts a small pebble on the monument to show love and respect for the loved one and that the visitor has been there.

There are special foods or desserts on certain holidays to commemorate the happenings of Biblical times. On one holiday we bake a cookie dough filled with prunes or poppy seeds and shaped like a three-cornered hat for Haman, the enemy of the Jews in the Bible story of Esther. On Passover there are matzohs and derivatives of it to commemorate the time when the Jews made their exodus from Egypt and they had only flour and water for food. There are recipes for every holiday. I remember when I was a child we would go to Granville to my grandparents' home. They would receive from Israel a giant lemon, called an etrog, packed in cotton, and a few sprigs of dried leaves. This was for Passover, when prayers were said over the bitter and the sweet. The recipes were all brought over from Europe and adapted to the North American way of eating.

Every Friday evening before sunset we would light two candles and put on head coverings and say a prayer in Hebrew to God to thank Him for our food and good health. My mother taught us a Hebrew prayer to say every night and Jewish lullabies.

We had a happy time all together and helped each other with any problems. There was no jealousy, only respect for each other. My childhood was a happy time and I have wonderful memories. It doesn't happen like that any more.

Mother's Recipe for Rugelach (Crescents)

3 cups flour
1 pkg. dry yeast
1/2 lb. oleo
3 egg yolks
1 cup sour cream
1 teaspoon vanilla

Mix flour, yeast, oleo, egg yolks, vanilla and then sour cream. Mold into a ball and refrigerate overnite in Saran wrap.

Filling mixture: 1 cup sugar
2 teaspoons of cinnamon
1 cup of nuts chopped fine

Blend filling mixture. Sprinkle 1/4 of nut mixture on board. Divide dough in 4 parts. Place 1 part on nut mixture and roll in circle. Cut like pie into 12 pieces. Roll each triangle from wide end to the point to form a crescent. Repeat with remaining dough.

Place on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees about 20 minutes. Watch carefully so they do not burn.

Siblings of Clara Rosen

- Harry died at a young age.
- Sidney is a realtor and resides in Brandon.
- David, a partner in the firm of Rosen and Berger, is retired and has a home on Lake Bomoseen.
- Irving, who died recently, was a merchant on New York's Fifth Avenue and resided on Long Island. In 1989 he donated money to complete the stained glass window project in the West Rutland Town Hall.
- Sara Raphael, who also recently passed away, ran a catering business in Atlantic City. Her son, Arnold, a diplomat, was killed with President Zia of Pakistan when their plane was shot down several years ago.



A Family Portrait. (l to r) Front row: Stanley Grief, Max Fishman, Dora Kugel Fishman (Clara's aunt), Hayya Mevzos Rote-Rosen (Clara's grandmother) holding baby Ann Broad, Murray Raphael, Abraham Rote-Rosen (Clara's grandfather), Gussie Doloff (Clara's mother), Morris Doloff, Ruth Kugel Broad (cousin). Second row: Bert Doloff, Sara Raphael (sister), Mac Reisel, Lena Reisel (aunt), Tillie Grief (aunt), Abe Grief, Sara Fishman, Shepard Broad. Third row: Clara, Pearl Seff Rosen (sister-in-law), David, Sidney, Irving and Harry Rosen (brothers), Eva Rosenthal Rosen (sister-in-law), and Frieda Fishman.

*WEST RUTLAND SYNAGOGUE
(1907)*

*Rabbi Abraham Rote-Rosen
Granville, New York*

*Rabbi Louis Rosen
Center Rutland, Vermont*

*MERGED WITH RUTLAND JEWISH
CENTER in 1927*



Bar and Bat Mitzvah

They didn't give Bar Mitzvah lessons when my brothers were growing up, so three times a week they would walk to Center Rutland to my father's father who had a general store and he would teach them and confirm them himself when they were thirteen. He had been a rabbi in Europe. That was the extent of their religious education.

Thirteen is the age when you become a man in the Jewish religion. The boys that have been confirmed can wear the prayer shawl at Friday evening services when the Sabbath begins at sundown. You are counted as a man to help make a quorum of ten men otherwise you can't have a service.

When my brother Sidney started Pharmacy school in Albany he was more religious than the rest of us at that time, and the other students in his class would ask him why he wore religious symbols and prayed every morning. He said "God is listening to me and that is why you guys have to borrow money and stamps from me all the time."

To follow the Ten Commandments and the Holy Days all one's life to become a better person, is a beautiful tradition.

Bat Mitzvah for girls wasn't started until my daughter was fifteen and now the girls have as large a celebration as the boys. Our son started his religious education at the age of seven in Newark, New Jersey. I showed him the bus route and every day after school he would take the bus and get off at the Synagogue and come back by himself. There was an elderly shoe repair man who had his shop at our son's stop and he would wait for me to pick him up in the repair shop. He went to the Hebrew school until he was Bar Mitzvah. We had a celebration for him and all the friends and relatives came. We were proud of him. He was very bright. Our daughter was very bright also but in different ways. We were very lucky and proud of both of them. My husband wanted six children but we settled for two.



Ben Eisen



Clara Eisen

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Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of appropriate dues. (See dues schedule below.) Membership provides a subscription to the Quarterly, "News from Nickwackett", entitlement to vote at business meetings, and benefits accruing from support of the Society's exhibits, programs, collections and library. The year through which membership is paid and the category of membership are noted on all address labels.

Please send any address change on Postal Service Form 3576 (a postcard freely available at your local post office).

Annual Meeting is held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of October.

Annual dues categories are:	Sponsoring—\$50.00	Students—\$8.00
	Contributing—\$20.00	(18 & under)
	Regular—\$10.00	Senior Citizens—\$8.00
		(62 & up)

Special one-payment categories are: Lifetime—\$200.00 Memorial Gift—\$200.00

Advance payment for 2 or 3 years is welcome, helping to reduce costs.

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